Guess Who?

LEVEL: High Beginner to High Intermediate

TIME REQUIRED: 20 minutes

GOALS: To write sentences about yourself, your life, or your opinions; to listen for details as your classmates speak; to learn more about your classmates

MATERIALS: Paper and pencils or pens

OVERVIEW: In this activity, students discuss

one of their favorite topics—themselves! The activity involves listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and it can be adapted for almost any language feature. (See the Appendix on page 46 for a list of example language features and possible question prompts.)

PREPARATION:

Prepare a question that asks students to describe themselves, share details about their lives, or explain their ideas about a topic. Be





sure the question is open-ended enough that students will be able to write at least five sentences in response, but specific enough so that each student's responses will be unique. It may be helpful to think about how you would answer the question yourself. Students will be reading each other's papers, so be sure the question is not too personal or sensitive.

PROCEDURE:

Prepare students for the activity by introducing the question prompt you created. For example, if they have been studying the simple past tense, your open-ended question might be What did you do for fun as a child? Write the question on the board and read it aloud. Then, to model the language you expect students to use in their responses, give your own answers to the question. You might say, "As a child, I drew pictures for my mother. I played soccer in the park with my friends. I watched cartoons at my grandmother's house." Write the model sentences on the board.

If possible, and if you want, show the class pictures of yourself as a child doing one or more of the activities you mention—or show other images that relate to those activities.

- 2. If students need additional language support, write a sentence frame on the board that they can use to generate responses. A sentence frame for the example question could be *As a child, I [simple past verb].*
- **3.** If necessary, briefly review any grammar or vocabulary items students may need in order to write their responses.
- **4.** Have students take out a piece of paper. Tell them *not* to write their names on the paper!
- **5.** Ask students to write five sentences in response to the question that you wrote on the board in Step 1. (You can adjust the required number of sentences based on the students' level.) Tell students that their papers will be read by others in the



class later, so they should write responses that they feel comfortable sharing with classmates and the teacher. If some students finish writing before others, encourage them to add more detail to their responses.

- **6.** Put students into groups of 6 to 10. If you have fewer than 12 students, the whole class can do the activity together. Explain the directions for the activity:
 - **a.** Group members will place their papers facedown in the middle of the group and mix them up.
 - **b.** Each student will select one paper from the pile and quickly check that it is not his or her own. If students pick up their own paper, they should return it to the pile, mix up the papers again, and select another paper.
 - **C.** Each student will read the paper he or she selected aloud to the group while the other students listen carefully. When the reader

- gets to the end of the paper, he or she will say, "Who am I?" One at a time, the other students will guess who wrote the paper by saying, "You are [name of student]." If the guess is incorrect, the student whose name was guessed will say, "You're wrong!" and guessing will continue. When a student guesses correctly, the student who wrote the sentences will say, "You're right!" (For additional support, write the sentences *Who am I?*, You are ..., You're right!, and You're wrong! on the board as you explain the directions.)
- **d.** Another student will read the paper he or she picked from the pile, and group members will guess again. Groups will continue this process until everyone's paper has been read aloud.
- **e.** Before beginning the activity, ask questions like, "What will you say when you finish reading the paper?" and "What will you say if you want

to guess the name of the writer?" to confirm that students understand the directions. Ask if students have any questions about the directions and answer them.

- 7. Tell the groups to begin the activity. While they are working, move from group to group to check that students are on task and to listen for any frequent errors. Make a list of frequent errors as you hear them.
- **8.** When all the groups have finished, have students return to their seats. On the board, write examples of any frequent errors you heard and ask students to help you correct them.
- **9.** Close the activity by asking students to raise their hands if they learned something new about a classmate. Ask a few students to share examples of new information they learned about their classmates. (For additional support, you can write the question *What did you learn about your classmates?* and the response frame *I learned that ...* on the board.)

VARIATIONS

Limited Time

Use this variation if you have limited time or if you would like to have all students focus on developing listening skills. Complete Steps 1 to 5 in the Procedure section. Then, collect students' papers and read them out loud while the whole class guesses the name of each author. This variation is an option if you split this activity over two class sessions: students can complete the writing portion of the activity at the end of one session; then, as a warm-up activity at the beginning of the next session, you can read the responses, and the class will guess the name of each author.

Assumed Identity

Instead of writing about themselves, students pretend to be a well-known person or celebrity (an actor, politician, musician, sports figure, etc.) and respond to the question as if they were that person. Then, instead of trading papers, students read their own papers out loud and their group mates guess who they are pretending to be. This variation can be completed in small groups or as a full class.



Find the Lie

Students respond to the question by writing about themselves, but they also include one false statement—one "lie"! They read their own papers out loud, and their group mates guess which statement is not true. For lower-level classes, the teacher should write a sentence frame on the board that students can use to guess which statement is false. For the example question What did you do for fun as a child? the sentence frame for identifying the lie would be You didn't [simple past verb]. This variation can be completed in small groups or as a full class.

EXTENSION

- **1.** Complete Steps 1 to 5 in the Procedure section.
- 2. Tell students they will receive a classmate's description, and it will be their job to find the paper's owner by mingling (walking around to find partners to speak with) and asking other students questions about the description they received.
- wrote on the board during Step 1 in the Procedure section. Model how to form yes-or-no questions from a sentence and write the questions on the board next to the examples. For the examples given above, you would write Did you draw pictures for your mother? Did you play soccer in the park with your friends? Did you watch cartoons at your grandmother's house? For lower-level students, you can provide another sentence frame. For this example, the sentence frame would be Did you _____?
- **4.** Redistribute the papers to the class so that no student receives his or her own paper.
- **5.** Ask students to follow the examples on the board to write five questions based on the statements on their new paper.
- **6.** Add *Did you write this?* to the list of questions on the board. Model the speaking portion of the activity by inviting a student to ask you the

- questions on the board. Say "yes" each time, including when the student asks, "Did you write this?"
- 7. Have students stand up and circulate around the room to find a partner. Students will take turns asking each other their questions. If their partner answers "no" to any of their questions (indicating that he or she is not the paper's author), they should find a new partner and repeat the process. Tell students they should not show their paper to any partner unless someone says "yes" to all five questions. Then, they may show the paper to their partner and ask, "Did you write this?" If their partner says "yes," they return the paper to him or her. Students continue to mingle, asking and answering questions, until they have returned the paper they received to its original owner and their own paper has been returned to them. At that point, students should sit down.
- The activity can continue until all students sit down. However, depending on your class size, students who finish first may grow bored waiting a long time for others to complete the activity. One way to prevent this from happening is to stop the mingling after about half of the students have completed the activity; students will pass unmatched papers to you so they can be returned to their owners. Another option is to have students who have completed the activity go to a different part of the room to begin another task. For instance, students could write sentences describing what they learned about their classmates through the activity.

This activity was written by **Tabitha Kidwell**, a doctoral candidate in Applied Linguistics and Language Education at the University of Maryland. She has taught French, Spanish, and English on five continents to students ranging from preschoolers to adults. Her research interests focus on language teacher education.

The photo extension on pages 47 and 48 was compiled by *English Teaching Forum* staff.

APPENDIX

Additional Language Features and Related Question Prompts

Language Feature	Question Prompts
Likes and dislikes	What foods do you like and dislike?What music, books, and movies do you like and dislike?
Adjectives to describe people	How would you describe yourself?Who is your role model, and what characteristics do you admire about that person?
Family-related vocabulary	 How would you describe your family members? Which family members do you spend the most time with, and what do you do together?
Modal verbs	What chores do you have to do at home?What do you have to do every morning to get ready for school (or work)?
Simple present tense	What do you typically do after school?What makes you feel happy?If you have a bad day, what do you do to feel better?
Present perfect tense	What have you done that you are proud of?What experiences have you had that make you unique?
Simple past tense	What did you do last weekend?What did you and your friends do the last time you got together?
Past continuous tense	What were you doing in 2010?
Future tense	What will you do over the next school vacation?
Future continuous tense	What will you be doing 10 years from now?
First conditional	 If it rains tomorrow, what will you do? If you go to college (or university), how will your life change?
Second conditional	 If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go, and what would you do there? If you could improve our school or community in some way, how would you improve it?
Third conditional	If you had been born in [another city or country], how would your life have been different?



The prompt in Try This is "What did you do for fun as a child?" On this page and page 48 are photos of children having fun. Ask students to look at the pictures and describe what the children in the pictures are doing. Then, ask students whether they have ever done (or whether they still do) each of the activities. If the answer is yes, have them look at the photos again and compare the fun activity in each photo to their own experience. What are some similarities—and what are some differences?

"What did you do for fun as a child?"









Activities Shown:

1. Riding bikes; 2. Jumping rope; 3. Climbing a tree; 4. Playing hide-and-seek; 5. Swinging; 6. Blowing bubbles